

Testimony on Single Sex Schooling
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Thank you for the opportunity to comment on HB 4264, proposed legislation to end the prohibition on single gender schools in Detroit.

This proposed legislation violates the Equal Protection Clause of the U.S. Constitution and federal Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, exposes girls and boys who attend them to sex discrimination, and the state and Detroit Public Schools to liability if they choose to implement them. Allowing parental or student “choice” or “flexibility” to override Constitutional and statutory protections against discrimination is a radical suggestion, and a completely unacceptable one.

For the last 30 years we have struggled to end sex segregation in education opportunities. This bill, if passed and implemented, would end our journey toward equality of opportunity in Detroit. It would roll back progress by creating intentionally segregated, different and therefore unequal opportunities. As we learned during the bad old days of race segregation in our schools, separate is inherently unequal.

Single-sex education theoretical constructs are often based on harmful sex-stereotyping or vague, untested generalizations about boys and girls. Current law governing single-sex education allows such programs to compensate for barriers that limit educational opportunities for young people on the basis of their gender, but contain strong protections against sex discrimination. In *United States v. Virginia*, the U.S. Supreme Court made clear that any justification for gender-based classifications must be “genuine, and not hypothesized” and may not rely on “overbroad generalizations about the different talents, capacities or preferences of males and females.”

History has shown us that without safeguards in place, girls often end up getting the short end of the stick by receiving less desirable facilities, less experienced teachers, and fewer class and co-curricular resources. The Michigan Legislature should not contribute to sex disparities in education by passing this bill.

The push for sex-segregated education represents a return to a time when girls had far fewer and inferior educational opportunities, and turns its back entirely on the lessons our nation’s history has taught us. The prohibition on single sex schools, classes, and programs should not be amended or curtailed. Equal educational opportunities for boys and girls must be preserved in co-education settings that are enriched by programs that we know work – early childhood enrichment programs, smaller class sizes, more parental involvement, and highly qualified teachers. Single sex schools are not the answer to student achievement problems.